

HUNGRY HORSE VILLAGE
(Hungry Horse Government Camp)
(Hungry Horse Contractor's Camp)
(Hungry Horse Ranger Station)
Flathead National Forest
8972 Highway 2 East
Hungry Horse vicinity
Flathead County
Montana

HABS MT-112
MT-112

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HUNGRY HORSE VILLAGE (HUNGRY HORSE GOVERNMENT AND CONTRACTORS' CAMPS) (HUNGRY HORSE RANGER STATION)

HABS No. MT-112

Location: 8972 Highway 2 East, Hungry Horse, ^{vicinity} Flathead County, Montana, within the Flathead National Forest. The site is located on a north/south axis at a right angle to U.S. Highway 2 on the north. Colorado Blvd. comes south off Highway 2 and provides main access to the remaining buildings in the government and contractors' camps on its way to the Hungry Horse dam itself. What remains of the warehouse complex is located one-quarter mile east of Colorado Blvd. just south of the residential area. The Hungry Horse Dam itself is located three miles upstream on the South Fork of the Flathead River.

U.S.G.S. Hungry Horse Quadrangle

UTM Coordinates: 11.718356E 5362725N NAD83

Township: Township 30N, Range 19W, section 8, SW ¼ of the NE ¼

Present Owner: United States Forest Service
Flathead National Forest
1935 Third Avenue East
Kalispell, MT 59901

Present Occupant: United States Forest Service
Flathead National Forest
1935 Third Avenue East
Kalispell, MT 59901

Present Use: Not currently in use. To be demolished fall 2005.

Significance: The site itself is significant in local, regional, and national history for its association with the construction of Hungry Horse Dam and the impact of the dam on the local and regional economy, most notably the immediate creation of jobs associated with the dam's construction and more long-term job creation by other industries attracted to the area by the dam's production of cheap electricity, such as Alcoa Aluminum Company. The buildings that made up the warehouse complex of the Hungry Horse government/contractor's camps were an integral part of the huge effort that took place between 1945 and 1953 to construct what was at the time one of the largest and highest dams in the world, Hungry Horse. The remaining buildings of the warehouse complex include a Three-Sided Metal Shed (HABS No. MT-112-A), the Maintenance Shop/Spotted Bear District Warehouse (HABS No. MT-112-B), and Sand Shed (HABS No. MT-112-C).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Hungry Horse Dam is situated on the South Fork of the Flathead River in northwestern Montana. The name Hungry Horse reportedly comes from a story of two horses who wandered away from their camp during the severe 1900–1901 winter. Presumed dead, the animals were found almost starved, having struggled in belly-deep snow for a month. The name stuck and was given to a mountain, lake, and creek in the area where the incident occurred, and later to the dam, which is located a short distance downstream.¹ Standing 564 feet tall, the dam is thirty-eight feet thick at the top, 330 feet thick at its widest, and more than one-third mile long at its crest.² At the time of its construction, Hungry Horse Dam was one of the largest in the world; it also boasted the highest “morning glory” spillway in the world. The reservoir behind the dam is similarly massive: Hungry Horse Lake is thirty-four miles long and three and one-half miles wide at its widest, reaches depths of five hundred feet, and has a surface area of thirty-seven square miles.³

Ever since the early twentieth century, Montana residents had been considering the possibility of harnessing the Flathead River for irrigation and power generation, as well as a means by which to provide flood control. In 1921, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) began studying the area in earnest, a process that continued over the next twenty years. In 1934, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported on investigations they too had conducted in the area, but movement stalled likely due to the Depression. Momentum began to build once again in 1943, when the Corps returned its attention to the Flathead area, first proposing to raise the level of Flathead Lake for water storage. When this proposition met with local outcry, the Corps scrapped the idea and focused instead on the Hungry Horse Dam as an alternative. By 1944, they had officially chosen the site for the dam’s location.⁴

World War II proved to be both an impetus to the construction of Hungry Horse Dam and an impediment. Congress recognized that electricity was a vital resource for wartime manufacturers and saw Hungry Horse as an appealing source of power. However, Congress was also combating wartimes shortages, which limited the budget for domestic projects and decreased the availability of local manpower. Nonetheless, the Hungry Horse Dam was authorized June 5, 1944, to begin as soon as necessary materials and manpower could be diverted from the war to the project.⁵ Immediately thereafter, the Bureau of Reclamation commenced investigations to determine dam size and location and to make arrangements with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), many of whose facilities would be flooded by the new reservoir.⁶

¹ The story is retold in a number of places. See, for example, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation [BOR], *Hungry Horse Project* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965), government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library.

² BOR, *Hungry Horse Project*; and BOR, “Hungry Horse Project, Montana: Flathead County,” Region revision 7/[19]83, from project data book, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library, n.p.

³ BOR, *Hungry Horse Project*.

⁴ BOR, “Technical Record of Design and Construction, Hungry Horse Dam and Powerplant,” constructed 1948–1953, Denver, Colorado, May 1958, government documents, University of Montana Mansfield Library, 1. Eric A. Stene summarizes this report in “Hungry Horse Project,” 9th draft, Bureau of Reclamation, History Program, Denver, Colorado, Research on Historic Reclamation Projects, 1995, www.usbr.gov/dataweb/html/hungryho.html (accessed July 26, 2005), 2–3. I have consulted both the primary and secondary documents in this summary. For a more detailed overview of the dam construction than I have provided here, refer to Stene.

⁵ Stene, “Hungry Horse Project,” 1, 3.

⁶ Stene, “Hungry Horse Project,” 3.

The first phases of construction began in 1945, with the appointment of a project engineer in January and construction of the access road in August. Work on the project began in earnest in 1947, as various contractors toiled with differing amounts of success and speed to clear the reservoir area of timber.⁷ Dam construction commenced the next year, when Secretary of the Interior Julius A. Krug awarded Seattle-based General-Shea-Morrison the contract to build both the Hungry Horse Dam and its powerhouse in April 1948.⁸ Montana governor Sam Ford set off a symbolic dynamite charge on July 10, 1948, and work on the dam began in earnest the following day.⁹ The power plant was the next item of business, with construction beginning in late spring 1950 and expected to be pushed "as rapidly as possible" to meet the October 1952 date on which the first unit was to go on line. The next three generators, which the General Electric Company was supplying, were to be producing power no later than December 1953.¹⁰

Work speed-ups, such as that anticipated with the powerhouse construction in spring 1950 and simultaneous accelerations in concrete placing, reservoir clearing, and spillway construction increased already elevated hiring levels and expanded the need for accommodations at the construction site. In mid-1950, for example, the Department of the Interior reported that it expected employment at Hungry Horse to exceed the previous year's peak, reaching 1,900 within the first two weeks of June and potentially rising to 2,500 as the construction season progressed.¹¹ The projections were not far off; construction engineer C. H. Spencer reported in his annual evaluation of progress in 1950 that 2,400 workers total (including both government employees and contract laborers) had been employed that year, an increase of 500 workers over 1949. Spencer anticipated further increase in 1951, with the number of employees rising to as high as 2,800.¹² Overall, 1951 was the year with the highest average number of contractors, with an average of 1,072, and 1953 was the lowest, with an average of 109; government employees reached a high of 396 in 1951.¹³

Not only were employment levels strong during the traditional construction season from May through November, but winter work proceeded apace as well, keeping many workers occupied year-round. Although logging and clearing in the reservoir were hampered by heavy snows and late springs, other kinds of work could be performed during the winter months and technological advances allowed increasing numbers of workers to stay employed at times when they traditionally would have had to cease operations. Engineers devised "overcoats," of "chicken wire, insulating paper, and wood shavings" to place over curing concrete on steel forms; they also added calcium chloride to the concrete to increase its strength and to prevent damage caused by freezing. These methods worked when temperatures were

⁷ Stene, "Hungry Horse Project," 3-4.

⁸ "Hungry Horse Contract Signed," *Reclamation Era* 34, no. 6 (June 1948): 120.

⁹ "Hungry Horse Breaks 'Fast,'" *Reclamation Era* 34, no. 10 (October 1948): 197.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, Information Service, Hungry Horse Project press release, April 27, 1950, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library.

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Information Service, Hungry Horse Project press release, May 30, 1950, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library.

¹² Department of the Interior, Information Service, Hungry Horse Project press release, January 1, 1951, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library.

¹³ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction, Hungry Horse Dam and Powerplant," constructed 1948-1953, Denver, Colorado, May 1958, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library, 197-98, 200.

below freezing for short periods of time, but they were not effective during extreme cold spells, when temperatures remained below freezing. Nonetheless, they added months to the construction season.¹⁴

"Round-the-clock" construction was another way in which the contractors increased productivity at the Hungry Horse Dam. In December 1948, *Reclamation Era* reported that earlier that fall General-Shea-Morrison had begun suspending powerful "star" lights across the canyon, five hundred feet over the river below. The lights illuminated the entire work area and allowed construction activities to continue unabated twenty-four hours a day, in addition to providing a "spectacular view from the access highway." Apparently, however, the lights posed somewhat of a danger to passersby. The article's author warned visitors to be "extremely careful when driving to the dam site at night."¹⁵

The magnitude of the project in terms of the dam's size was reason enough to ensure that large numbers of workers would be needed for at least seven years (1948–1953). Work accelerations due to demands for power in the area added to the demand for on-site laborers. The remote location and lack of housing or facilities for the workers and their families necessitated the construction of towns for both government and contract workers. What came to be called Hungry Horse Village or the "dam town" was built approximately three miles downstream from the construction site. The town complex consisted of two distinct entities, which were located adjacent to one another and which shared some facilities, the contractors' camp and the government camp. A 1958 report on construction of the dam referred to the government camp specifically as "Hungry Horse Village" but this appellation appears to have been used interchangeably for both camps, which were adjacent to one another.¹⁶ The same report mentioned that Hungry Horse Village was adjacent to the town of Hungry Horse, indicating that the two were thought of as distinct entities. However, a 1957 map included in the report did not mark the location of anything but the "Gov't Camp" in relation to Hungry Horse Dam—nowhere on the map is Hungry Horse (town) or Hungry Horse Village.¹⁷ Thus, the official relationship of the town to the village—in other words, which came first, the camps or the town—remains unclear.

Located about one mile south of U.S. Highway 2 and three miles downstream from the dam in the South Fork Valley, the contractors' camp served the needs of contract laborers and their families by providing housing, shopping, a dining hall, recreation, and medical services. In addition to a fully equipped trailer park and guest house, thirty-five two-bedroom and fifteen one-bedroom residences housed families; four bunkhouses lodged between seventy-five and 150 men; and an eight-apartment building served couples. Each building had electricity, indoor toilets on septic systems, and running hot and cold water, and the neighborhoods had paved streets. In addition to the housing available, residents patronized a meat market, grocery, and clothing store in a large Quonset hut, purchased drugs in the drugstore and ate in the dining hall in another Quonset hut, and recreated in yet another Quonset hut that boasted six bowling alleys, a restaurant and bar, and card and billiard tables.¹⁸

The government camp was located next to the contractors' camp about a mile further downstream from the dam. Residents in this section were government employees of all stripes, organized into ten main divisions: safety (including labor relations), camp management, special services (responsible for information, documentation, visitation, and foreign visitor programs), office engineering, field

¹⁴ Quotation from Department of the Interior, Information Service, Hungry Horse Project press release, November 1, 1951, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library. See also Hungry Horse Project press release, May 30, 1950.

¹⁵ "Night into Day at Hungry Horse," *Reclamation Era* 34, no. 12 (December 1948): 241.

¹⁶ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 200.

¹⁷ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 200, 2.

¹⁸ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 202–3.

engineering, personnel, supply, programs, finance, and power operation and maintenance. Government employees oversaw bidding and awarding of contracts; supplies procurement, distribution, and warehousing; architecture and design; legal matters, such as right-of-way negotiations; processing claims or protests; and other general management tasks.¹⁹

The government camp contained fewer residents than the contractors' camp. Still, their needs were well provided for. Permanent residences in the government camp included fourteen five-room and six six-room wood-frame houses with attached garages, as well as a dormitory to house single men working at the project that consisted of twenty-four sleeping rooms. Temporary housing was also constructed, with twenty-five wood-frame duplexes, each connected by a two-car garage; twenty-four two-bedroom and twenty-two three-bedroom prefabricated wood-frame buildings, three with basements; twenty-eight "relocatable" buildings; forty-four trailer homes. Six garages with room for a total of forty-six cars completed the accommodations for government workers living in Hungry Horse Village. Additional accommodations were provided in the form of tent camps for government workers in the reservoir area.²⁰

Unlike the contractors' camp, the government camp possessed no commercial enterprises of its own, and residents relied on the stores and services in the contractors' camp or in nearby towns, such as Hungry Horse, Martin City, Coram, Kalispell, Columbia Falls, or Whitefish, to fulfill their needs. Like the contractors' camp, however, the government camp provided residents with electricity, potable water, telephone service, sewer and septic, and oil-fired space-heating equipment.²¹

Shared facilities for the contractors' and government camps consisted of a schoolhouse for kindergarten through eighth grade (high school students bussed to Columbia Falls, six miles away), which the contractor constructed but which was located in the government camp. Additionally, a clinic with on-site doctor managed minor medical concerns and referred others to hospitals in Kalispell or Whitefish, and fire services and police protection were provided by employees and company guards, aided by Montana State Highway Patrol, respectively.²²

While statistics have yet to be unearthed that outline the demographic composition of the workers and kin who lived in the Hungry Horse government and contractors' camps, it is clear from the simple presence of family housing and the school that these semi-permanent towns were the home not only to thousands of male (and possibly a handful of female) workers but also to women and children.

Disabled workers also apparently made the contractors' camp their home while working on the dam's construction. On October 12, 1951, the Department of the Interior proclaimed, "physically handicapped workers help build Hungry Horse Dam" and attributed to these men a "major role" in "helping keep construction ahead of schedule."²³ According to the communiqué, which referred readers to a more detailed article in the October 7-13 issue of *Reclamation Era*, the Bureau of Reclamation's mouthpiece journal, the major contractor on the project, General-Shea-Morrison followed a "strong policy" of employing disabled men. This policy was not based in "altruism" but "in the knowledge that

¹⁹ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 199.

²⁰ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 200, 202.

²¹ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 200.

²² BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 203.

²³ Department of the Interior, Information Service, Hungry Horse Project press release, October 12, 1951, government documents, University of Montana, Mansfield Library, 1, 2.

these men, when placed in the right spots, frequently do a better job than men with unimpaired facilities."²⁴

Many of these men had been injured in combat during one of the world wars; others were the victims of polio or work accidents. Contrary to what might be expected, the press release noted, a majority of the men, some of who were amputees, were employed as cableway operators or signalmen, a key position in a "high-speed operation that keeps concrete moving from the mixing plant to the dam at an average rate of 7,600 cubic yards, or 30,400,000 pounds every 24 hours." Ralph Olson, for example, was "literally bolted to his job"—his artificial arm was attached to the cableway speed control by a specially fabricated steel joint that Olson designed and machined himself. At least eleven other men joined Olson on the roster of disabled workers at the Hungry Horse dam site.²⁵

Very little is known about the specific uses of the warehouse complex in which the three-sided metal shed, maintenance shop, and sand shed examined in this report are located. The complex was physically located in the government camp but like other facilities such as the school and medical clinic may have served both government and contractors' needs. A 1958 report on the construction of the dam mentions these particular buildings in a separate section on the government camp, but notes that "the project offices, warehouses, garages and vehicle repair facilities, and operation and maintenance structures were located in the *village*," a term the report defines elsewhere as including both camps.²⁶ The report describes the buildings later as part of the general service facilities at the government camp, including the warehouse, heavy duty shop, carpenter shop, and paint shop, all of which apparently refer to buildings in the warehouse complex. According to more recent site drawings, done after the USFS reacquired the land from the Bureau of Reclamation in 1967, the paint shop (Building 20, which has been demolished) was located immediately south of what is known as the "maintenance shop" (Building 19)—its proximity to the building in both the historical documentation and in historical naming indicates a continued correlation.²⁷

²⁴ Hungry Horse Project press release, October 12, 1951, 1.

²⁵ Hungry Horse Project press release, October 12, 1951, 2.

²⁶ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 200.

²⁷ BOR, "Technical Record of Design and Construction," 202.

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HABS no. MT-112
Hungry Horse

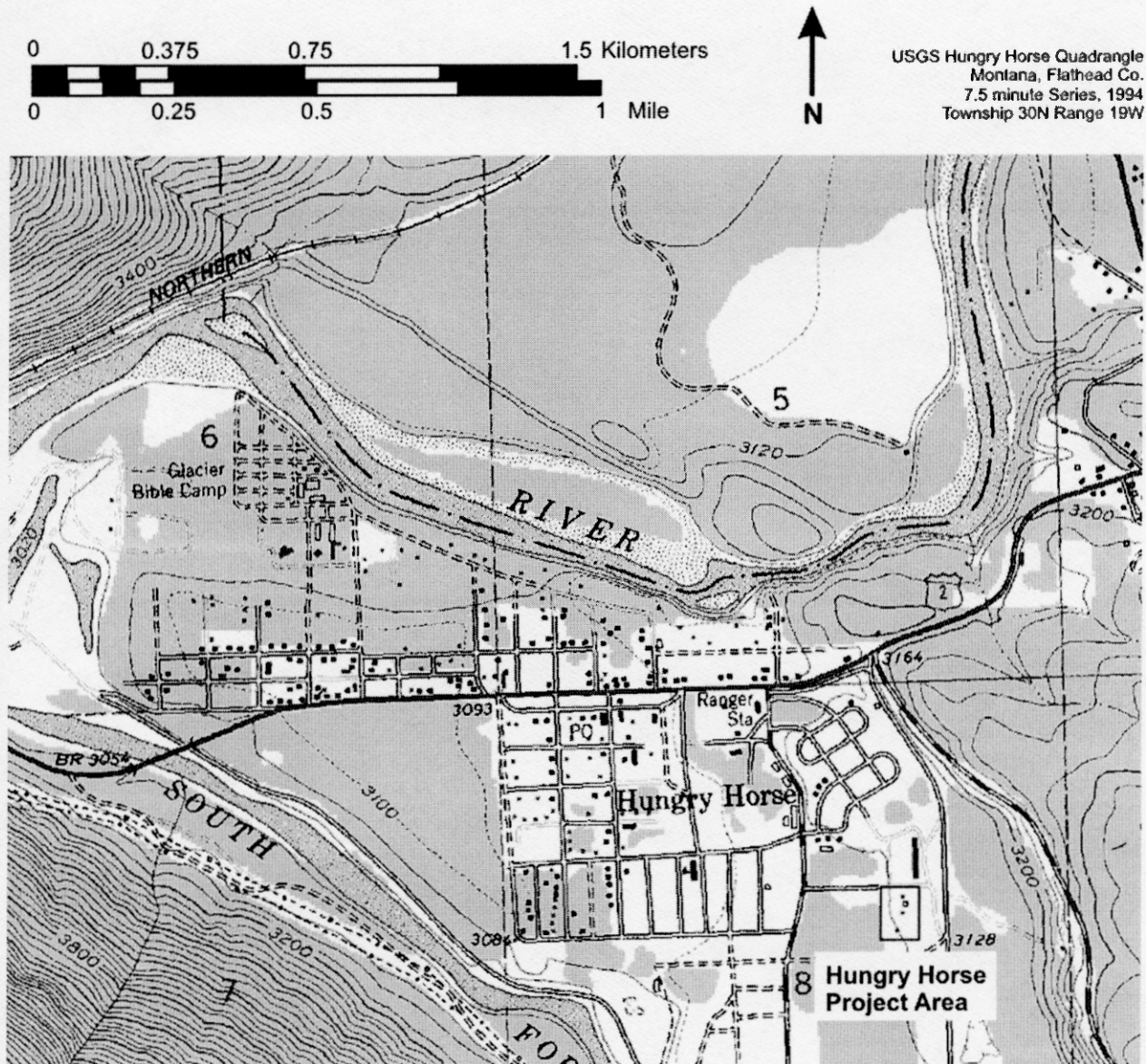


Figure 1 Location of Hungry Horse Village

HABS no. MT-112
Hungry Horse

0 50 100 200 Meters
0 150 300 600 Feet



Hungry Horse
Flathead Co., Montana
Township 30N Range 19W
Aerial Photograph 1991



Figure 2 Aerial view of Hungry Horse Village (government camp) warehouse complex

HABS no. MT-112
Hungry Horse

Hungry Horse
Flathead Co., Montana
Township 30N Range 19W
Aerial Photograph June 4, 1949

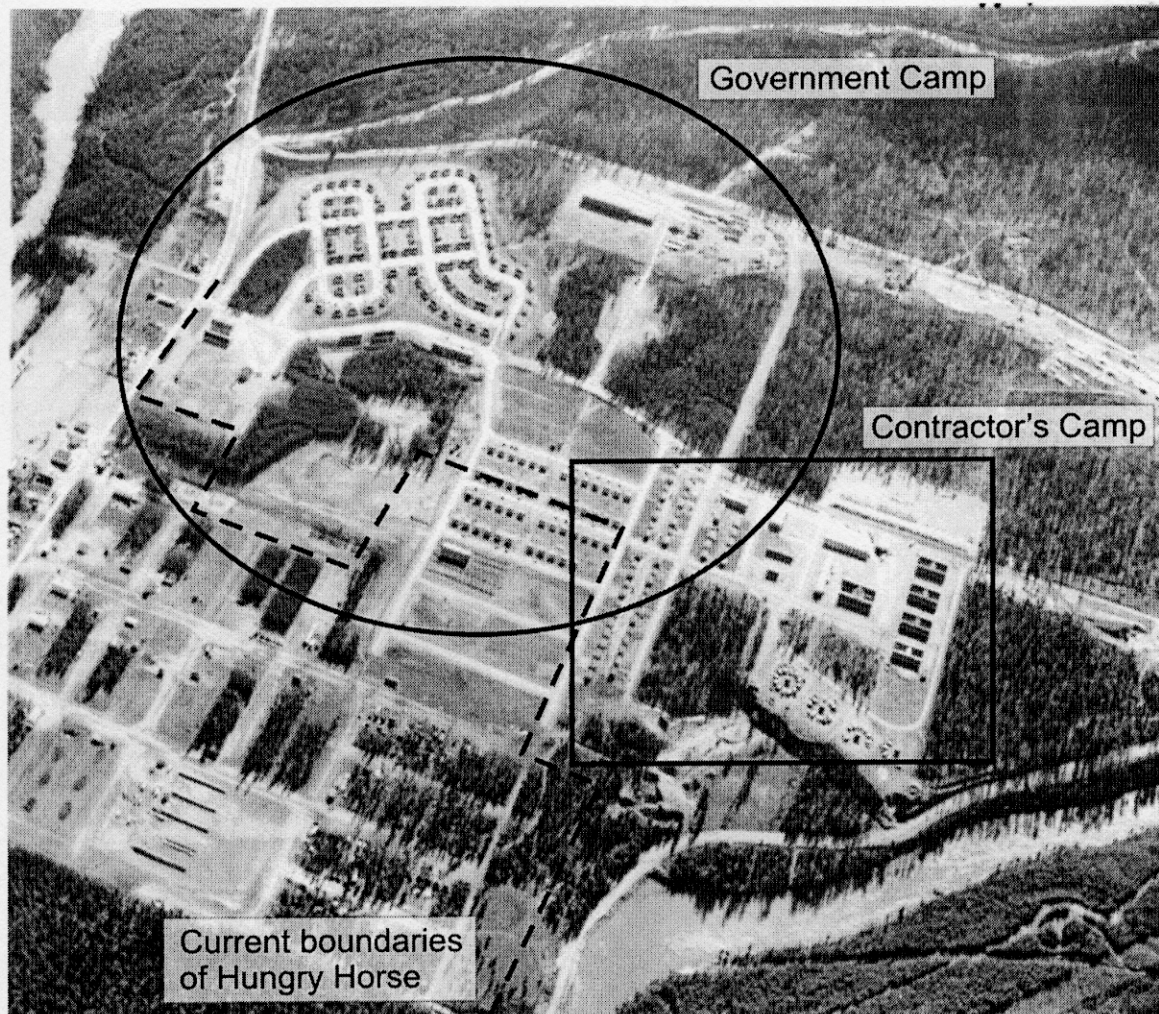


Figure 3 Aerial oblique view from June 4, 1949, showing Hungry Horse Village (Bureau of Reclamation Government Camp and Contractors' Camp). Town site of Hungry Horse is seen at lower left.